

# Heritage NEWS

*The Good News Issue*



August 2012

## HOME TOUR TICKETS

**\$10 in advance**

Downtown Salt City Antiques  
Materials Unlimited  
Haab's Restaurant  
Washtenaw Norton's Flowers & Gifts  
Depot Town Nelson Amos Studio  
Ann Arbor Downtown Home & Garden

**\$12 day of tour**

Haabs Restaurant  
& in front of the  
Ypsilanti Historical Museum

## Why we like to look at old houses

**R**ealtors smile and smugly call us "Looky-Loos," knowing full well that we don't intend to buy anything. They've got our number: they conclude we're just at their Sunday open houses because we're nosy. But inveterate home-tourers think there's more to it than that. We say it's the instinct for nest building that draws us to see the insides of other people's houses.

Academics tell us the nesting instinct refers to the urge in pregnant animals to prepare a home for the upcoming newborn(s). It is found in a variety of animals (both mammals and birds), including humans. We can agree with most of that—with the exception of the "pregnant" part.



**In animals:** In rodents—and most of the critters we strive to keep OUT of our houses—the nesting instinct is typically characterized by the urge to seek the lowest sheltered spot available—where these mammals give birth. Female dogs may show signs of nesting behavior shortly before their due date that include pacing and building a nest with items from around the house such as blankets, clothing, and stuffed animals.



Domestic cats often make nests by bringing straw, cloth scraps, and other soft materials to a selected nook or box; they particularly are attracted to haylofts as nest sites. In birds it is known as "going broody" and is characterized by the insistence to stay on the nest as much as possible, and by cessation of laying new eggs.



**In humans:** In human females, the nesting instinct often occurs around the fifth month of pregnancy but can occur as late as the eighth—or not at all. It may be strongest just before the onset of labor. It is commonly characterized by a strong urge to clean and organize one's home and is one reason why couples who are expecting a baby often reorganize, arrange, clean the house, and maybe even wax the driveway.

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Ypsilanti  
Heritage  
Foundation's



**204 Elm Street**

Jasper and Carole Pennington

**120-124 West Michigan Avenue**

Mellencamp Building loft apartments  
Eric and Karen Maurer

**228 West Michigan Avenue**

Wolverine Grill / Kevin Hill

**1885 Packard Road**

Breakey Farm Home/  
Ypsilanti Public Schools  
Administration Building

**214 North Huron Street**

Dr. Cheryl Farmer

**714 East Forest Avenue**

Amy and Jesse Morgan

**105 North Normal Street**

Dian Love

**192 Oak Street**

Karen Wongstrom

**Beginning overleaf:**

Property descriptions editor, Penny Schreiber;  
photographs by Lynda Hummel

## 204 Elm Street

Rev. Jasper and Carole Pennington



The brick arts and crafts cottage-style home of Jasper and Carole Pennington was built about 1926 by James and Betty Power. James Power was the area manager for the Craine Stationery Company. The house served as the rectory for St. Luke's Episcopal Church from 1951 until 1986. Jasper Pennington was the rector of St. Luke's from 1983 until 2001, and the Penningtons moved into the house in 1983, purchasing it in 1986. Its interior is captivating, reflecting the Penningtons' keen interest in antiques and family history and showcasing their collections of pottery, music, and books.

As tourgoers go through the first floor of the house they will enjoy the reproduction 1880s William Morris Strawberry Thief wallpaper in several rooms; the Pewabic tile on the entryway floor and the original chandelier hanging above; and the stained glass windows displaying the Pennington coat of arms. Family portraits and other fascinating family treasures abound. Of special interest is the sizable portrait of New Jersey governor William Pennington that is an original etching by artist A. B. Walter of a photograph taken by Civil War photographer Mathew Brady. It hangs just to the left as you enter the front room.

The kitchen was first remodeled in the 1950s and then remodeled again in 2010. Motawi Tileworks of Ann Arbor designed the tile backsplash and counters. The Penningtons had the front porch enclosed in 1990, allowing them to use it in all four seasons. Wicker furniture on the porch came from Carole Pennington's maternal grandparents. Outside of the house the corner lot holds a variety of plants and shrubs tended by Mrs. Pennington. They provide color over many months and food for birds and squirrels year round. An interesting variety of outdoor ornaments enhances the gardens, which have spread out onto the Grant Street easement. A garden shed and the original two-car garage complete the property.

## 120-124 West Michigan Avenue

Mellencamp Building / Eric and Karen Maurer



Ypsilanti developers and landlords Eric and Karen Maurer purchased 120, 122, and 124 West Michigan Avenue in March 2010. With the rich history of the buildings in mind, they renamed them the Mellencamp Building. A clothing store and the longest-lived retail tenant in downtown Ypsilanti, Mellencamp's inhabited the first-floor commercial space at 122 for 116 years, closing in July 1984.

Built in the 1850s, the buildings encompass 16,020 square feet of retail and residential space. The Maurers restored the first floor into three now-thriving retail spaces and created twelve stunning loft apartments on the second and third floors. This brings the number of loft apartments the Maurers have renovated in downtown Ypsilanti to forty-two. The twelve apartments rented by word of mouth before they were ready for occupancy. Tenants are young professionals or graduate students.

All of the apartments have some brick walls and lots of light pouring in to wide-open living spaces. Tourgoers will be seeing three apartments today. The tenants have applied personality, imagination, and style to organizing the spaces to suit themselves. Two decided against the suggested location of the bedroom. One is using it as a sophisticated dressing room that features a fabulous large wood-framed mirror leaning against the wall; the other has the space set up as her "den," with a TV and a cozy couch. The third tenant created an enclosed bedroom for his young daughter and walled off an area for a home office. In this apartment tourgoers will enjoy seeing the mid-century-modern kitchen table with six matching chairs that came from the tenant's grandmother. Ladders displaying beautiful shoes are scattered about the apartment of the tenant with the dressing room, and the tenant with the den has a silvery faux fireplace.

When the Maurers took possession of the property, scraps of paper documenting transactions at Mellencamp's were found in the stairway leading to the second floor.

## 228 West Michigan Avenue

Wolverine Grill / Kevin Hill



customers diner style for over seventy-five years. John Batsakis, a Greek immigrant, bought the restaurant in 1938 after enduring much hardship during the Great Depression. He lived in an apartment above his business for twenty-five years until he sold it to his nephew Greg Batianis. The diner remained in the family for another four decades until, sadly, it closed in October of last year. Greg's daughter, Deb Comer, the last family member to run the business, and her husband, Mike, still own the property and are currently renovating the apartments above.

Enter current proprietor Kevin Hill, who began his cooking career at Aquinas College in Grand Rapids and went on to hone his chef skills in Hawaii, California, and Marquette, Michigan. He retired from the culinary arts field as a vocational instructor in Livingston County. A big booster of the Ypsilanti business community, Hill could not sit idly by when a once-bustling eatery closed its doors. But the "old girl" needed a bit of sprucing for round two. After more than a half century of serving the public, the daily grind had taken its toll on the Wolverine. Hill jumped in with both feet and began the rejuvenation of the Wolverine.

The high tin ceiling remains, along with the ceiling fans, which give the place a vintage feel. The too-bright fluorescent lights have been muted, fresh paint applied, and the old chrome lunch-counter stools cleaned up. The menu has been elevated above simple coney-dog diner fare to showcase some of Kevin's favorite dishes. Ingredients will be locally sourced, when possible, and the Ugly Mug Cafe and Roastery is providing the java and Growing Hope the fresh produce and greens in season. Business is returning to the Wolverine, and the future may bring some evenings of family-style dining. Kevin Hill has abandoned his retirement to bring a historic Ypsilanti business back to life.

## 1885 Packard Road

Ypsilanti Public Schools Administration Building



**A** mainstay of the Ypsilanti restaurant scene, the Wolverine Grill has been serving

**T**he center part of this Greek Revival structure dates from 1830, when Isaac N. Conklin built it for his family. In the nineteenth century, the house was far out in the countryside and the centerpiece of a farm with fruit orchards. In 1910 when Dr. James Breakey and his wife bought the house, it was still a country place. The Breakey family did not move in until 1915, and they moved out a year later because it was too far away from town. The family rented the farm to others over the years; they bought neighboring farms until they owned 130 acres.

The Breakeys' son, James Jr., always dreamed of moving back into the house. By 1967 he was Judge Breakey, and he and his wife, Evelyn, remodeled the house using plans he designed and they moved in. The remodel added two libraries, a master bedroom wing, a breakfast room, a garage, and a gardening room and nearly doubled the size of the house. Judge Breakey died in 1969, and under the terms of his will the house and property were bequeathed to the Ypsilanti Board of Education in memory of his parents. The school district moved their offices into the house in time for the beginning of the school year in September 1970.

A second addition was completed in April 2011 on the east side of the building, paying heed to its Greek Revival style. A spacious development room and storage spaces fill up the new wing. Tourgoers will enjoy going through the building, which features original woodwork and five fireplaces. Many details of the original house and the Breakey addition remain. Artist Steve Allen is the husband of Karen Allen, administrative assistant to the superintendent. A number of his oil paintings are on loan to the building and they enliven the walls at every turn.

A school district receptionist who has worked in the building for twenty-six years is certain it is haunted. She used to come in frequently at 4:30 a.m., and while making phone calls to substitute teachers she'd listen to someone bumping around on the second floor. "I am sure it is Mrs. Breakey," says the receptionist. "I've heard her many times."

## 214 North Huron Street

Dr. Cheryl Farmer



**T**his stately Italianate house was built between 1851, when the property was deeded to grocer Frederick Andrews, and 1856, when it first appeared on the city map. It retains its characteristic Italianate features like the elaborately detailed entryway and the low roof with wide overhanging eaves supported by decorative brackets. The bay windows and the wonderful enclosed porch on the south side that wraps around the back of the house are later additions.

Most fortunately, the essential interior character of the house has survived multiple uses, including being divided into apartments, housing the Boys and Girls Club in the 1960s, and serving as a continuing education center for Washtenaw Community College in the 1970s.

Former Ypsilanti mayor Cheryl Farmer, who is also a physician, has owned the house since 1988 when she purchased it from Paul and Gerry Woodside. The couple had undertaken a four-year renovation that was nearly ruined by a 1984 fire. Dr. Farmer built on their efforts by removing temporary walls to open up the porch and creating a second interior staircase to access the second floor. She had the original banister restored and the bathrooms completely redone with period fixtures.

Everywhere in Dr. Farmer's house are paintings by her father and grandmother, glass art by her sister, and family furniture, including many items given to her by her parents when they broke up housekeeping to live year-round in Hawaii. Examples are her mother's piano, a bed made by her father that he gave to her mother on their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary, and a pier mirror, also made by her father, that was a fiftieth-anniversary present. Tourgoers will be visiting the terrific second-floor furnished apartment, which was not open in 2000 when the house was last on this tour. Dr. Farmer's parents stay in the apartment when they are in town.

The view out the back windows is to Riverside Park and the river.

## 714 East Forest Avenue

Amy and Jesse Morgan



**T**his charming bungalow, originally built in Willow Run sometime in the 1930s, was moved to its present location on East Forest by Robert Lloyd. A young man who worked as a civil engineer at Willow Run Airport, Lloyd and his wife, Hazel, moved into the house on the new site as newlyweds in 1947. Lloyd was offered a job in California. The couple went west but decided not to sell, leaving everything in place until their expected return. The furniture and many of their belongings, including dishes in the kitchen sink, remained undisturbed over the years. Neighbors mowed the lawn, looked after the home, and let their children play in the yard. Finally the windows were boarded up to keep them from being broken.

Robert and Hazel Lloyd never returned to their Ypsilanti home. In 1971 they were listed as the "retired" owners, and by 1975 the house was described as vacant. The Lloyds left it to their family to sell their honeymoon house in Ypsilanti. An empty time capsule for at least twenty years, the house avoided unfortunate interior changes. The wood trim was never touched, and the original character of the house remained intact.

The house was finally sold to new owners in the early 1970s and then sold again in the 1980s. In 1992, EMU professor Rebecca Martusewicz bought the house, planted trees, and transformed the empty lot into a series of English gardens. In 1998 she began to re-imagine the space inside. With the help of her father, she designed an attic suite complete with a balcony overlooking the garden.

Amy and Jesse Morgan bought 714 East Forest in 2005. A two-career couple with two delightful young children, they have somehow found time to complete a house project every year. The exterior has been painted, the kitchen remodeled, a new bathroom put in, and windows replaced. Recently they added a new front porch. The newest owners understand the Lloyds's attachment to their house. The Morgans say they can't imagine ever leaving it.



## 105 North Normal Street

Dian Love



**W**hen Dian Love first walked into this diminutive 1860 house in 2003 she immediately noticed that she could see all the way through it from the front to the back door. “It had one common lane,” says Love. A retired professor of interior design who has taught at U-M, EMU, and the Rhode Island School of Design, Love had always wanted a house with white walls in the Greek Revival style.

Love bought the 878-square-foot house and immediately set about making it into her home. The front porch was in a shambles and the exterior needed fresh paint. After she took care of those problems, Love changed the inside from a two-bedroom into a one-bedroom house, redid the bathroom, and had all the walls painted white. She took out interior doors and framed the openings. The space across the front of the house functions as her living area to the right of the entryway and her office to the left. The narrow kitchen at the back is an earlier addition.

A search at the U-M Bentley Historical Library turned up two owners, one in the late nineteenth century and the other in the early twentieth, who lived in the house with a boarder (presumably long before the addition). This offers inhabitants of the twenty-first century insights into the different living-space requirements of those who lived in previous centuries.

Love’s tiny house is full of her amazing stuff: paintings she describes as “Rhode Island signed pieces”; framed fragments of Chinese, Peruvian, and Egyptian textiles from the second and third centuries; Chinese export porcelain pieces from the late 1800s; and much more.

The small house extends dramatically in nice weather into the spacious back yard, where Love has created a blue garden inspired by French and British ones she has admired. The garden is what tourgoers will see when they look through the house from the front door to the back.

## 192 Oak Street

Karen Wongstrom



**N**ear the end of World War I Ypsilanti carpenter Frank Lidke built several houses in the Oak-Forest neighborhood. Among them was the charming bungalow at 192 Oak Street. In 1920 he sold the new house to George Jackson, probably a farmer, and the father of seven-year-old Lucy. Lucy Jackson Gridley lived in the house for sixty-four years until she and her husband sold it in 1984 to landscape architect Paul Sieron.

Sieron adapted the interior of the home to suit his tastes and utilized his landscaping skills to create the front gardens. The house and garden deteriorated with the next owner. Since 2010 the present owner, Karen Wongstrom, has freshened the interior with new paint and added her turn-of-the-century antiques. She is currently restoring the front garden.

The bungalow style was popular throughout the United States from about 1890 through the early twentieth century. Typically one or one-and-a-half stories (this house is one story) and strongly horizontal, the style was characterized by a gently sloping roof with wide overhanging eaves. Bungalows gradually lost popularity and by World War II were no longer being built. Today bungalows are once again valued for their practical designs, natural materials, and harmony within the landscape.

This particular example also used distinctive tapered Egyptian-influenced window and door trim. As you enter, notice that the trim style is repeated in the rooms inside. Tambour doors, salvaged from the old School of Pharmacy at Wayne State University, and leaded glass panels, discovered in a Depot Town antique shop, were used by Paul Sieron to create the elegance of a vestibule separate from the living room. Antique shops in Depot Town also yielded the handsome oak mantle that surrounds a black marble fireplace and the built-in sideboard in the kitchen.

The present owner has used rich but subdued colors to give a cozy craftsman feel to the interior while not distracting from the light that floods in the windows and the delightful sense of being in nature. As you leave through the back door you can still look out on a backyard little changed from when seven-year-old Lucy played under the oaks.

# Good News for Historic Preservation @ Ypsilanti



Photo by  
Lynda Hummel,  
whose photo essays  
on Ypsilanti signage  
will be featured  
in the next issue  
of Heritage News

## Good News

### Commercial Historic Structure Markers awarded in May 2012

bring the total to more than 150 markers awarded throughout the city since the program began. Most of the 2012 markers call attention to great examples of adaptive re-use, critical to preservation.

Recipients included:

- The Corner Brewery
- Materials Unlimited
- Utilities Instrumentation
- Michigan Ladder Company
- MCRR Freighthouse
- Millworks Building / Ypsilanti Food Co-op
- Ypsilanti Automotive Heritage Collection



## Good News

### A revised City sign ordinance

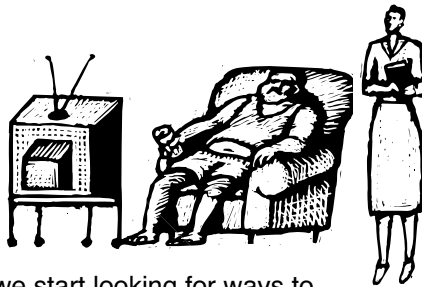
enacted in 2011 now protects designated signs of historic significance:

- Rapid Shoe Repair on Pearl Street
- Bull Durham Tobacco on the Follett House in Depot Town
- Tap Room
- Terry Bakery
- Haab's Restaurant
- Marquee at 31 N. Washington
- Trojan Dry Cleaners
- Hudson sign at the Automotive Heritage Museum
- Peninsular Paper Company

## Looking at houses

[continued from page 1]

For some of us, the instinct never lets up. We feel it long after childbirth. In fact, sometimes it kicks in when we start anticipating the tots LEAVING our nest as we start looking for ways to change the space they've been taking up for so long.



Hundreds of people in Ypsilanti get this same nest-building feeling in late summer when the annual Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation Home Tour is announced.

### Iconoclast Al Wallace disagreed with this popular theory in 1856

[Printed in the INTELLECTUAL OBSERVER of July 1867]

Alfred Russel Wallace, in "The Philosophy of Birds' Nests" argues that ... [p. 413] "Birds, we are told, build their nests by instinct, while man constructs his dwelling by the exercise of reason. Birds never change, but continue to build forever on the self-same plan; man alters and improves his houses continually. Reason advances; instinct is stationary. This doctrine is so very general that it may almost be said to be universally adopted.

"Men who agree on nothing else, accept this as a good explanation of the facts.

Philosophers and poets, metaphysicians and divines, naturalists and the general public, not only agree in believing this to be probable, but even adopt it as a sort of axiom that is so self-evident as to need no proof, and use it as the very foundation of their speculations on instinct and reason. A belief so general, one would think, must rest on indisputable facts, and be a logical deduction from them. Yet I have come to the conclusion that not only is it very doubtful, but absolutely erroneous; that it not only deviates widely from the truth, but is in almost every particular exactly opposed to it.



A.R. Wallace, Library of Congress

"I believe, in short, that birds do not build their nests by instinct; that man does not construct his dwelling by reason; that birds do change and improve when affected by the same causes that make men do so; and that mankind neither alter nor improve when they exist under conditions similar to those which are almost universal among birds."

Food, water, shelter. Everything else is extra. We'll see you birds on the Home Tour. -td



## *Good News* @ the Thompson Block

John and Mary Delcamp, members of the Civil War reenactors, Company E, 17th Michigan Infantry, contacted building owner Stewart Beal for permission to add murals over the covered windows of the historic Thompson Block that was ravaged by fire in September 2009. Beal agreed and they contacted the Historic District Commission and Ypsilanti High School art teacher Robin Evans.

Sixty-seven of Evans's students took it from there with two-dimensional designs commemorating the space that served as a barracks, a wagon repair shop, army mess hall, and living quarters for recruits waiting to be shipped off to the country's Civil War.

Evans told AnnArbor.com, "Having their artwork out in the community is big. It's great having it inside, but putting it up somewhere where the whole public can see it is huge for them and gives them pride in their town and their school."

Participating students are planning a commemorative ceremony during August's Ypsilanti Heritage Festival.



## *Good News* @ 120 W Michigan

Window hoods designed and constructed to replicate originals removed when metal facade was attached.



## *Good News* for Historic Preservation



*Good News*  
@ 330 E. Cross -  
Front porch stair rail  
designed and constructed  
to match existing  
original porch rail.



*Good News*  
@ 234 W Michigan  
Handsome paint job.



The Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation

## Heritage News

Claudia Pettit  
945 Sheridan  
Ypsilanti, MI 48197

### Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation

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Jane Schmiedeke

*Dedicated to the belief that one of Ypsilanti's greatest resources is its historic architecture*

*See you at the Home Tour - Sunday, 19 August 2012, Noon-5 p.m.*

Heritage News is a publication of the Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation. It is published six times a year: August, September, November, January, March, and May; and distributed free of charge to the membership by mail, and made available to the public at City Hall, Farmers' Market, and various business locations in the City business districts.



*Good News*



Famous entrance

*Good News*

### Downtown's venerable Tap Room gets a new coat of paint

Known for its unique low-mounted front door handle intended to extend a subtle welcome to the many "little people" who worked in tight places on the WWII bombers at Willow Run, the Tap Room provides a delightful "before" and "after" drama to this summer's street scene as their upper stories shift from white to gray.

### Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation meetings are held at the Ladies' Literary Club, 218 N. Washington Sreet, Ypsilanti, MI.

The Ladies' Literary Club was organized in 1878. The Club House, of the Greek Revival type, was built in the 1840s and purchased by members of the club in 1914.

Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation meetings held at the "Ladies' Lit" are open to the public



"Ladies' Literary Club" watercolor by Barb Starnerv